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# Border Imperialism, Racial Capitalism, and Geographies of Deracination

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## Abstract

This article provides an extended overview and explicatory synopsis of border imperialism. Drawing primarily from the insights of Harsha Walia's (2013) *Undoing Border Imperialism*, we aim to situate the concept in interdisciplinary literature and show how it can be effective for scholars, activists, and organizers alike committed to political education, transformative research and organizing, and struggles for emancipation. In addition, we illustrate how as an analytical framework it is useful towards understanding the myriad interlocking dynamics generated by the convergence of borders, race, and migration. Focusing on the bordering regimes of what are now called the United States of America and Canada we also: offer a diagnosis of how colonial power and borders produce geographies of deracination; underscore the inextricable links borders have with Western neo(liberal) worldviews, settler colonialism, and white supremacy; highlight the relationship amongst racial capitalism, the state, biopower, and nationalism; offer a snapshot of how intersectional feminism is useful when engaging with migrant struggle; and finally, take to task common misconceptions and myths about migrants. The goal of the piece is thus to incite action, academic and otherwise, towards centering dignity in research and activism, undoing border imperialism, and advancing decolonization.

## Keywords

border imperialism; racial capitalism; colonialism; borders; race; migration; biopower; Fanon

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**deracinate**

(de·rac·i·nate) /dr'jæsinat/

*transitive verb (used with object)**de·rac·i·nat·ed, de·rac·i·nat·ing; de·rac·i·na·tion (noun)*

1. to pull (or rip) up by the roots; uproot; extirpate; eradicate
  2. to force (people) from their homeland to a new or foreign location
  3. to isolate or alienate (a person) from a customary culture or environment
  4. to remove the racial or ethnic characteristics or influences from (an area)
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*Look at all these borders,  
foaming at the mouth with bodies broken and desperate...*

Warsan Shire (2011)

**Introduction**

Despite the torrent of news stories, radio reports, television soundbites, and social media echo chambers doggedly banging the proverbial drum about “crisis” and “dangerous caravans,” the world is not so much experiencing catastrophes related to migrants and refugees as it is to borders. Borders, at once a cause, symptom, and consequence of violent deracination, division, and dehumanization, serve as a justification for and byproduct of imposed imperialist will and forced uprooting—carved into the ground and onto bodies. Although arbitrary, borders signal to us who ought to matter versus who ought not; who is from a “great” place versus who is from a “shithole;” and who is human versus who is “animal.” Hallmarks of stolen land, racial animus, consolidated settler authority, and concentrated sites of a colonial vision of the world made manifest, borders confine and claim, enclose and exclude. Put another way, the “problem” to solve and “crisis” at hand are neither migrants, nor asylum seekers — it is bordering.

Borders are used in myriad ways to assert sovereignty, broker deals, neglect bodies, kill Others, build empires, craft racist narratives, whip-up nationalism, and ultimately, “claim the center.” But the center never holds. After all, the shared universal story of humanity, since our beginning, is one of journey, sojourn, and longing to be. That these profoundly human activities, experiences, and desires are presently being met with such fanatical contempt and seething malice, by both the repressive appendages of the authoritarian state and select reactionary factions of civil society, is not only jarring and heart-wrenching, but outraging and fight-provoking. Yet, borders never halt the movement of people. As various migrant mobilizations across the globe have so powerfully illustrated, borders themselves create more problems than they resolve. The movement of peoples precedes the state and capitalism by many millennia; it predates passports, security checks, biometric surveillance, invasive searches, body scans, and borders themselves. Until recently, boundary crossing was not an exception, but the norm (Hansen, 2009). Migration is an inherently human phenomenon—an experience and necessity shared by peoples across all continents throughout the world. In short, the collective history of humankind is one of movement.

It is with the realizations noted above, as well as a foregrounding of the border’s indissoluble relationship with ongoing colonial oppressions, (settler) logics of elimination, (white supremacist) practices of domination—and death—that our article advances.<sup>1</sup> Our

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<sup>1</sup> For a deeper understanding of these see: de Leeuw and Hunt (2018), Nunn (2018), Pulido (2018), McClintock (2018), Radcliffe (2018), McKittrick (2017), Bawaka Country et al (2016), Bond and Inwood’s (2016), Daigle (2016), Kermoal and Altamirano-Jiménez (2016), Wolfe (2016), Women’s Environmental Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network (2016), Melamed

purpose is twofold: first, to briefly explain, amplify, and further traffic into academic literature the notion of border imperialism (Walia, 2013).<sup>2</sup> And second, to contribute to the profuse amount of transformative work being carried out by researchers, activists, and writers on what is being produced by the convergence of race, borders, and migration. We pursue these aims in the forthcoming sections by 1) sharing an overview of what border imperialism is as an analytical framework; 2) demonstrating the interlocking confluence of racialization, global capitalist exploitation, and transnational migration; 3) dispelling some myths about migrants whilst sketching an outline of how borders function in relation to race; and 4) linking the content to struggles for decolonization and human dignity. Notably, we make no claims of “decolonizing” borders, minds, teaching, activism, institutions, an academic discipline, or anything else for that matter. These emancipatory projects are far beyond the scope of what we can do, and in some cases, arguably, are not possible—not to mention are processes we should not be the leading voices for or faces of. Our goal, then, is to contribute, in one small way, to efforts being made to unsettle a colonial (and bordered) status quo that is wreaking havoc and harming so much of humanity and the planet.

## Deracination

*Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography,  
none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography.*

Edward Said (1994, 6)

One caveat we would like to offer before transitioning into our core assertions applies to our choice of the word “deracination.” We are using the term, as conceptualized by Vergara-Figueroa (2018), to describe a dynamic constellation of “economic, social, political, cultural, and ideological processes, which involves the violent dispersing of inhabitants from a territory” and includes the uprooting, expulsion, prohibition, and attempted elimination of a targeted (racialized) group. Notably, as Vergara-Figueroa (2018, 17) states, deracination is “constitutive of modernity-coloniality” and is a “foundational political epistemic category encompassing the diasporas, exiles, holocausts, cleansings, and genocides that different societies have known thorough their histories.” We further define it as a socio-spatial process of (de)territorialization and forced (dis)location that operates (both externally and internally vis-à-vis a particular state) as a social relation of domination, which unfolds over and effects places and populations differentially and uniquely. That is, deracination is a means for deciding who belongs versus who does not, severing people from their ancestral roots and homelands, and ending their presence in and connection to a place—it is humanity emptied out, in more ways than one.

Importantly, we are *not* arguing that deracination is a non-recognition of race, *nor* that somehow race as a social identifier will disappear or go unacknowledged, i.e. that deracination will give rise to a post-racial society. Quite the opposite. Our contention is that deracination reinscribes race by using it as pretext to judge Others abject or alien and cast them out. Analyses of deracination are thus socio-spatially contingent and context-dependent, and must be mindful of time (history), place (geography), and the politics of alterity/difference (identity). For example, the United States (US) has historically and continues to deracinate Indigenous people from their traditional territories, whilst also being culpable for the deracination of “the darker races of the world” (Du Bois, 1920) across the Global South/Majority World via imperialist war and neoliberal policies that continue to dispossess and contaminate lands while stripping people of livelihoods. Often resulting in their (attempted) moving elsewhere, an uprooting and migration caused by external forces. Subsequently, those who have been deracinated are not

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(2015), Moreton-Robinson (2015), Simpson (2014), Goeman (2013), Walia (2012), Byrd (2011), Morgensen (2011), Simpson (2011), Tuck (2009), Johnson et al (2007), Alfred (2005), Robinson (2000), Smith (1999).

<sup>2</sup> For a committed use of the concept see: Fu’s (2015) “What will it take to end gender-based violence?”

uncommonly met with racialized stigma, and barred, at borders. Or, they are only allowed in, temporarily or tenuously, to be exploited as “low-skilled” labourers.

That is, race is further engraved into bodies, at the behest of racial hierarchy, capitalist production, and class division—by borders. Borders which simultaneously deracinated constructed Others via their imposition (e.g. the forced and oft-lethal removal of Indigenous people that took place [and continues] to establish/maintain the respective reservation and reserve systems of the US and Canada). Moreover, on socio-psychological, spiritual, and kinship levels, to be allowed inside or continue to live within imposed colonial borders, permanently, the state as well as civil society mandates that Others must perform or become “white,” i.e., they let go of their “roots” in some way. Fortunately, as countless racialized people and ethnic minorities from any colonially-instigated diaspora have demonstrated, the demands for submission of a white supremacist state/society are not, by any means, a totalizing force. And that one’s “roots” can very well, indeed, be strongly held on to and thrive.

Crucially, when speaking of the estrangement and deprivation induced by deracination, we are not implying that some people or certain groups innately and absolutely “belong” or must return or “go back to and stay in” one specific place according to their race or origins. Rather, we are suggesting that if a group is forcibly removed from where they are living via colonial power, imperial aggression, heteropatriarchal threat/norms, or the driving forces of capital accumulation, be it directly or indirectly, they have been deracinated. Being deracinated also does not imply weakness or fragility. It means a group was targeted and assaulted. We rely upon deracination, thusly, because it signifies roots—which run deep and wide, nourish and connect. Admittedly, too, is that complexities certainly emerge when differing deracinated groups, people, and communities besieged by colonial-capitalist influences find themselves in the same place at the same time. There is no immediate answer to how some of these situations must play out. What is definite to say, as Fanon (1963) argues, is that they should be worked out via democratic and decolonial principles that are divorced from the modern state, private capital, and imperialist logics, and also not merely inclusive of, but led and guided by, those who have or are experiencing deracination.

## Border Imperialism

*Our strategy should be not only to confront empire,  
but to lay siege to it.*

Arundhati Roy (2003)

The analytical framework and expanded concept of border imperialism emerges out of the work of organizer, activist, and author Harsha Walia (2013). Earlier appearing briefly in an essay by Euskirchen, Lebuhn, and Ray (2007) that called attention to the death of thousands of refugees off the coast of West Africa, the authors write:

Europe also imposes its new immigration and border regime on other countries and regions on a global scale; therefore we can speak of a new “border imperialism.” If this is right, then we need to rethink our theoretical tools for analyzing borders and states. Based on how the new border regime is actually operating, we need to develop new concepts and categories to guide our field research and to draw conclusions about what these changes mean for political struggles “on the ground.”

In driving home the point that the political reach of borders is expanding and they should not be thought of purely as inanimate boundary lines, Euskirchen, Lebuhn, and Ray (2007) state “the real story of the border regime... ..is in the rising body count.” Additionally, as Walia (2013, 35) elaborates, borders can be more accurately defined as “a regime of practices, institutions, and discourses” that are used in a variety of regulatory ways to confine, monitor, discipline, and

punish—as well as preserve and expand empire. Borders, then, perpetually being (re)defined, imposed, and militarized across geographies, are undoubtedly more than meets the eye.

Walia's (2013) advancing, application, and development of border imperialism as a concept calls attention to the ways that borders are operationalized, as well as interrogates the inextricable links they have to colonialism and intensifying neoliberal practices of exploitation and abandonment. To speak of borders, thus, is to speak of colonization and capitalism, as well as their heteropatriarchal, race-oriented, Other-generating, and symbiotic forms, functions, and foundations. On this front, Walia (2013, 5) notes an "analysis of border imperialism interrogates the networks and modes of governance that determine how bodies will be included within the nation-state, and how territory will be controlled within and in conjunction with the dictates of global empire and transnational capitalism." In addition, the term challenges us to think beyond national boundaries as static delineations of lands and territories whilst urging us to view the state not solely as tangible infrastructure and elected politicians that we can see and touch. But rather, to understand the state as both a power-laden *condition* and *relationship*—a relationship that everyone is in, one way or another (unique to their context, identities, and status[es]), regardless of consent or dissent. Furthermore, it is a relationship everyone experiences differently on account of the prejudicial, discriminatory, and pathologically unjust ways the state thinks and behaves. Border imperialism consequently pushes us to make the necessary connections that borders have with Western worldviews, racism, dispossession, displacement, patriarchy, and ultimately, empire.

Walia (2013), likewise, reasons that our current understanding of borders is partial unless it includes a comprehensive analysis of how they function, both materially and psychologically. She suggests our grasp of borders is incomplete if we do not consider what borders produce across varying geographies, for differing groups of people. To clarify her standpoint, Walia (2013, 5) adds, "border imperialism depicts the processes by which the violences and precarities of displacement and migration are *structurally* created as well as maintained [emphasis added]." Her diagnosis thereby takes specific aim at being able to precisely explain how borders govern, restrain, and oppress people at the foundational levels of society—people who are traversing (settler) colonial territories, navigating heteropatriarchal ableist norms, existing in colonial-capitalist modernity, and trying to not only survive, but live, laugh, and love, under the long shadows cast by rapacious empires.

Paying close solidaristic attention to the experiences and treatment of Indigenous people and negatively racialized people in settler colonial contexts, Walia (2013, 6) bridges the personal with the political, as well as points to common struggles across geographies, when she shares:

Discussing border imperialism also foregrounds an analysis of colonialism. Colonially drawn borders divide Indigenous families from each other. Just as the British Raj partitioned my parent's homeland, Indigenous communities across Turtle Island have been separated as a result of the colonially imposed Canadian and US borders. Indigenous lands are increasingly becoming the battleground for settler states' escalating policies of border militarization.

Incisive analyses such as these take to task any claims of benevolence, charity, and good intention that are offered by the West with respect to how they manage and administer borders, deracination, and migration. As a concept, then, border imperialism defies relegating matters of immigration to that of any single "colourblind" government, and instead links the politics of borders to global systems of asymmetrical and abusive power, systems which find their roots in "othering," white supremacy, enslavement, genocide, and the proliferation of war. Expounding upon this and how banal yet demonstrable the infliction of trauma has become at border zones, Walia (2013, 5) states:

Border controls are most severely deployed by those Western regimes that create mass displacement and [...] against those whose very recourse to migration results from the ravages of capital and military occupations. Practices of arrest without

charge, expulsion, indefinite detention, torture, and killings have become the *unexceptional* norm in militarized border zones [emphasis added].

Relatedly, another key element to understanding border imperialism is that, like modernity, the nation-state, the Westphalian order, and capitalist social relations—borders are neither natural, nor apolitical. Rather, borders are artificial constructions unjustifiably inscribed upon land and bodies through violence. From this perspective, it is essential to recognize the authoritarian exercises of regulatory control that borders perpetuate by analyzing the ways in which borders are used to surveil populations, manage exclusion, and administer punishment. Border imperialism as an analytical frame enables us to understand how borders induce hierarchies and are deployed as instruments of segregation that are wielded, ultimately, as weapons of empire. In this way, Walia's (2013) reckoning with borders demonstrates they are apparatuses of state repression, capitalist exploitation, and nationalist aggression and—that borders kill.

To be exact, the border is both a material and discursive mechanism used to do the dirty work of trapping people into having to navigate and withstand—constantly and inescapably—colonial power. As well as its concomitant abusive relationships, manipulation, and penchants for incarceration, negligence, and humiliation. Walia (2013) reinforces the links that imperial (b)ordering has with the deracination, stigmatization, and stratification of differing people:

...border imperialism illuminates how colonial anxieties about identity and inclusion within Western borders are linked to the racist justifications for imperialist missions beyond Western borders that generate cycles of mass displacement (6).

Practices of incarceration and expulsion, often shared across Western states, demarcate zones of exclusion and mark those deemed *undesirable* [emphasis added] (31).

As evidenced above, borders are not only the premeditated cause of de facto segregation and hierarchies of humanity, but also spikes of toxic stress, acute anxiety, and despair (Linton, Griffin, Shapiro, 2017). The effect of which is disproportionate amounts of physical, psychological, and emotional trauma being experienced by those deemed “undesirable” – especially their children – the repercussions of which can be lifelong and are exacerbated if one is ripped away from family (Van der Kolk, 2015). The scope of these practices is extensive. As a recent study on US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) conducted by Flores and Salazar (2017, 2) shows: “The United States has the world’s largest immigration detention system, detaining up to 442,000 persons per year; *many are children*. [emphasis added]” In offering a unnerving glimpse of this sobering reality, Linton, Kennedy, Shapiro, and Griffin (2018, 125), conducting research in pediatrics and medicine, illustrate:

Once in US custody, all immigrants, including single adults, families with children, and unaccompanied children, are transported to Customs and Border Protection Processing Centers. Almost 70% of all immigrants are processed through the Rio Grande Valley Sector Processing Center, located in McAllen, Texas. Temperatures in this facility are chilly (universally referred to as “hieleras” [ice boxes]), and children are initially in the same space with adults who may include the person who brought them through Mexico. “Processing” is the first step in US reception and takes place in chain-link, locked enclosures (called “perreras” [dog cages]), where children and their accompanying caregivers (parents, grandparents, older siblings, or other family) are subsequently separated into short-term holding cells by gender and age. This can leave toddlers separated from their caregivers, siblings separated from each other, or spouses separated from their partners.

Further confirmation that borders are not only instruments of power and division, but abuse.

The justification to establish and enforce/arm a border necessitates a perceived enemy “Other,” preferably one that is menacing, or at least constructed to be. Historically, this has been precedent.<sup>3</sup> Presently, however, the state cannot levy bigoted epithets upon target groups with orientalist legislation as recklessly as it once could. As an alternative, the racially-coded rhetoric and rule of law now deploys a jingoistic phobia-inciting vocabulary of “threat,” “crime,” “illegality,” “protection,” and “security,” with the term “alien” being especially damning (Jiwani, 2002). Walia (2013, 6) details the socio-psychological influence it carries as a discursive tool and device:

Migrants’ precarious legal status and precarious stratification in the labour force are further inscribed by racializing discourses that cast migrants of colour as eternal outsiders: *in* the nation-state but not *of* the nation-state.

“Defense” of the border is also an obsessive preoccupation of the colonial state, which it does both socio-spatially and dynamically—not to mention ruthlessly. In describing this, Walia (2013, 29) states: “Border securitization operates not at a fixed site but rather through structures and technologies of power across geographies.” Indeed, the border is ground zero for purging the Other, and its state-sanctioned enforcers have effectively been handed a blank check, a loaded gun, and impunity when it comes to capturing migrants, expelling the “undesirable,” incarcerating travelers, fracturing families, and confining children in cages. And no one is safe in a prison or cage. Just as no one is illegal or “alien.”

As detailed above, borders are violent socio-spatial phenomena. It is thus vital to draw attention to how they and the driving colonial-capitalist forces behind them are situated and relational, as well as generating affliction and anguish across places and psyches. That is, while global in scale and habit, the aftermaths and ongoing effects of borders and bordering processes are undeniably *emplaced*. Equally unique yet ubiquitous, corporeal and psychological, as well as internalized both individually and socially. And despite that the products of borders vary across time and space, the rationale and motivations underpinning them remain interrelated and certainly rhyme. Meaning, it is necessary to engage in historical and geopolitically contextualized analyses when it comes to diagnosing, scrutinizing, halting, and repairing the destructive consequences and human damage resulting from borders. Because as Walia (2013, 6) concisely sums it up: “Undoing border imperialism would mean a freer society for everyone since borders are the nexus of most systems of oppression.”

## The Twenty-First Century Colour Line?

*The colonized world is a world divided in two.  
The dividing line, the border,  
is represented by barracks and police stations.*

Frantz Fanon (1963, 3)

Writing of the social condition of Black people within the United States and continued segregation, Black sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois (2009, 4) distinguishes between two worlds—a white world and a secondary world “within the Veil.” Little more than a century later, Du Bois’s “colour-line” (2009, 11) is becoming increasingly evident in today’s “gated globe” (Cunningham, 2004). At first blush, the uninhibited movement of transnational capital and the ease with which some bodies now circumnavigate the globe have fueled perceptions of state borders as carrying little and less weight in a globalized world. However, as Sharma (2006) demonstrates (and every migrant knows), the nationalized border affects certain bodies differently. For a privileged few, the border is an administrative annoyance. It is comprised of

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<sup>3</sup>To name only a few (inclusive of both the US and Canada): Naturalization Act of 1790 (citizenship solely for: “free white persons of good character”); “Indian” Removal Act of 1830; Dred Scott v. Sanford case of 1857; Anti-“Coolie” Act of 1862; Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882; Chinese Immigration Acts of 1885, 1900, 1904, 1923; Immigration Act of 1924; “Mexican Repatriation” 1929-1939; Filipino Repatriation Act of 1935; Executive Order 9066 of 1942; Operation “Wetback” 1954.

wait times, baggage restrictions, strict discipline, and palpable discomfort under the probing gaze of humorless border agents. For Others, the border is intransigent, insurmountable, and inescapable. It is the dividing line between life and death, freedom and bondage, peace and war. The border fractures families—spouses from one another, parents from children, mothers from infants still at the breast. It criminalizes survival strategies carried out in desperation, hope, ingenuity, and courage. Perhaps, as Newman (2005) poignantly surmises, “the 21st century colour-line is the border.”

The border partitions and segregates not only space, but people(s) and races. It clings stubbornly like a shadow to one’s body, justifying panoptic watch, carceral governance, and the revocation of supposedly inalienable rights/freedoms. In the words of Sharma (2006, 7):

Contemporary border control practices, therefore, are products of and produce a global regime of apartheid in which at least two different legal systems operate within the space of any given national state - one that regulates national subjects and another that regulates foreign objects.

Expanding upon this argument, Anderson, Sharma, and Wright (2009) contend that the border does not merely function to regulate entry and exit—first and foremost, it governs contingent inclusion by dictating the relationship between individual bodies and the state, capitalizing on a system of global apartheid to ostensibly include the negatively racialized so long as the state and the capitalist can harness and monetize their labour.

As noted from the outset, borders are not so geographically fixed as many of us come to believe. Rather, the border is fluid, flexible, and active. It comprises “processes, practices, discourses, symbols, institutions or networks through which power works” (Johnson et al, 2011, 62). With this in mind, conceptions of the border as a singular, static line at the edge of the nation-state are no longer tenable (Johnson et al, 2011). More readily, as Mountz (2004, 342) writes, “The border is everywhere.” Meaning, the border is a regulatory apparatus that does not mediate human relations solely at the interpersonal level, nor is its power exercised exclusively over the individual. The border exists to regulate assemblages and *flows*—its purview is not only the management of discrete bodies, but the governance of group mobility as people traverse from one space to another. To draw upon Foucault (2009), its task is the superintendence of a multiplicity of kinetic individuals, which is an exercise of power that not only relies upon borders, but also orchestrates “regimes of truths” via discourses about the nation and citizenship.

The primary entity impelling populations to internalize and propagate identities and discourses surrounding citizenship, patriotism, “aliens,” etc. is the colonial-capitalist state, along with its attendant extremities (e.g. legal, education, prison, social welfare, immigration systems, etc.). The state, via the consolidated power, coercive authority, and the monopoly on violence (both veiled and overt) it wields, acutely marked and flexed by border security patrols and in detention centers, takes on the responsibility for training its obedient subjects and “good soldiers.” That is, the state’s endgame is the production of law-abiding consumer-citizens, fostering a sense of binding myopic unity amongst the populace, teaching the demos to conform, and remain beholden to its (Western) laws, logics, values, and worldviews (Fanon, 1963). Indeed, the state endeavors to colonize, capture, control, and accumulate. All occurring in myriad ways, with the means both obscured and naked. Regardless of form, it is often effective at inculcating loyalty and allegiance. And in grasping just how state discursive formations inscribe identities and constitute subjectification (i.e. the fashioning of a “subject”), it is helpful to look at the role of biopolitics in the state’s development of nationalism and citizen-subjects.

In detailing the ways in which people are socially governed and, in turn, personally govern themselves, Foucault (2003) offers the concept of biopower—a dispersed mode of control emanating from an array of concealed authorities (e.g. social norms, values, expectations, institutions). Biopower is thus an oft-indiscernible yet influential means of management, monitoring, and coercion that compels social bodies to act, think, and “be” in particular ways. Foucault elaborates upon the ordering and administering of society, as well as the reification of



citizenship via biopower, by observing that people are influenced by the presence of multiple and pervasive, yet invisible and judgmental, *normalizing* gazes (Foucault, 1994). This omnipanoptic scrutiny is mutable and context-dependent, inducing people to either submit and conform to, or contest and refuse, differing societal norms and cultural mores. Characterized as ubiquitous (self)surveillance that is quotidian, pervasively scattered, and immaterial, biopower ostensibly comes from everywhere, yet is identifiable seemingly nowhere (Foucault, 1994). Ultimately, its function is to discipline and domesticate.

Notably, contestations or defiance of society's codes of conduct and taken-for-granted anticipations carry punitive ramifications of varying degrees. Biopower is therefore an external yet diffuse force *and* internalized mechanism of persuasion that conditions people to iteratively self-examine. Subsequently, they can either auto-correct to remain complicit with what norms are being interpellated upon them (e.g. behaving as law-abiding- upstanding- model citizens, potential citizens, respectable Others, etc.), or, they can resist subjectification and act in disaccord with the normative labels they are pressured to engender (e.g. risk becoming labeled as delinquent, deviant, queer, criminal, a threat, etc.)—and be punished. In linking biopower to both race and the state whilst providing an account of what repercussions may follow, Foucault (2003, 256) elaborates:

In a normalizing society, *race or racism is the precondition that makes killing acceptable*. When you have a *normalizing* society, you have a power which is, at least superficially, in the first instance, or in the first line a biopower, and racism is the indispensable precondition that allows someone to be killed, that allows *others* to be killed. Once the State functions in the biopower mode, *racism alone can justify the murderous function of the State* [emphasis added].

Taking into consideration Foucault's dissection of the concealed and overt operational dynamics of biopower provides clarity on how race (or more precisely the practices, methods, and techniques of racialization) becomes the cornerstone of any given society's production of citizen-subjects. This is not to mention its production of values, vices, norms, forms of nationalism, culture, enemies, Others, and boundary-lines—aspects of the state and its population which are commensurately relational and co-constitutive. Similarly, thinking through biopower reveals how the state filters humans into categories of oft-arbitrary difference via processes of racialization, thereby levying upon each individual the responsibility of thinking of themselves, acting, and “knowing their place” as a particular type of (racial) subject who exists in a society of differing (hierarchized) classes. Classes determined and mediated by racial ideology and capitalist relations. What results is a social reality in which the life chances of some groups are enabled, whilst Others are foreclosed. Thus, for scholars focusing on the entanglements and interplay of race, borders, and migration, Foucault's analyses of biopower and state racism are markedly germane when examining the classification, stratification, and (de)valuation of differing people and populations across contrasting sites and situations.

Foucault's insights are especially salient when studying bordering mechanisms given how the discourses of the state and civil society writ large set boundaries around the way (good) citizenship, criminality, belonging, borders, and others are thought and spoken of. For example, consider stereotypes and suggestive phrases about “certain types of people” and the inferences and connotations attached to them because of where they are from and/or living (e.g. “ghettos,” “projects,” “the hood,” “the barrio,” “reservations/reserves,” “trailer park,” the “Third World,” “developing countries,” “shithole countries,” etc.). As Razack (2002) argues, such loaded labels demonstrate how spaces have become racialized, and race has become spatialized. And if we consider these phenomena in relation to the development of modern/colonial social hierarchies, they become, as Fanon (1963) contends, *fait accompli*—some people and places, via discursive processes of socio-spatial racialization, are *imagined to be* and *made* “wretched,” i.e. condemned, hence—are killable. This should signify to scholars that any use of Foucault for a critical analysis of the state, migration, citizenship, power, or the carceral that does not include a committed foregrounding of race—is not a critical analysis at all. More expressly, however, in

bringing Foucault's views on biopower into conversation with explicatory dissections of the operation of race and colonial power, as well as when deliberating what the constellation of borders, neoliberalism, nationalism, and human movement produces, it is not difficult to argue that the problem of the *twenty-first* century, indeed, still remains the colour-line, i.e. border.

## Migration, Racial Capitalism, and the State

*The destructive advance of Capital,  
always through war,  
demolished the first fiefdoms and kingdoms.  
Upon their ruins it raised nation-states.*

EZLN (2017)

Racism has been fundamental to the historical justification of policies that exclude migrants and exploit their labour. If the modern/colonial state is imagined as governing a "discriminable population, with a single, bounded space" (Rouse, 1991, 10), international migration wholly ruptures this framework. Traditionally, the modern/colonial state has claimed to embody a single people who speak a single language, live together in a territory under a single sovereign power, and are governed by single legal system (Tölölyan, 1991). Against this backdrop, foreign migrants are cast as endangering the state and all that it stands for—its homogeneity, unity, impermeability, security, rule of law, and order. Migration represents chaos, heterogeneity, a return to the nomadic, a loss of control, or a sort of perdition. Migrants, in turn, are perceived as feral, in that their very movement across international borders challenges the sovereignty and authority of the state.

Not unlike the "state," which tends to permeate research uncontested, the category "migrant" is frequently taken as a given. Rarely is any concrete definition provided of who constitutes a migrant. Conventional differentiations drawn by scholars and policy makers alike between refugees, immigrants, and migrants contribute to the (re)production of distinctions which often overlook the role of the state in the creation of these subjectivities. As Sharma (2006, 102) points out, the term migrant, as both a "legal *and* a social category," is in fact produced by the state and its borders. Nuanced definitions note that transnational migrants are made distinct from immigrants by their temporary status—that is, once their "legal" work contracts are complete, migrants must return to their countries of origin or risk becoming undocumented. In contrast, immigrants are distinguished in principal by their "permanent" and therefore somewhat less precarious legal status vis-a-vis their potential right to remain.<sup>4</sup>

While the "difference" that motivates the discursive construction of "migrant" in contrast to "immigrant" or "refugee" ought not be totally disregarded, such definitions problematically forefront both choice and mobility, casting im/migrants as individuals or groups who *choose* to *move*. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) characterizes a "migrant" as:

...all cases where the decision to migrate was taken freely by the individual concerned for reasons of "personal convenience" and without intervention of an external compelling factor; it therefore applie[s] to persons, and family members, moving to another country or region to better their material or social conditions and improve the prospect for themselves or their family.

Put differently, whereas refugees or trafficked persons have been *displaced*, migrants supposedly *place* themselves. The reality is, more often than not, less clear cut. While the movement of many racialized im/migrant communities may not occur in response to some disaster or manifestation of physical violence deemed newsworthy enough to capture the attention of the

<sup>4</sup> We want to be careful not to overemphasize the difference between migrants and immigrants before the law. Without a doubt, the legal status of permanent residents in Canada (as well as other places), even that of citizens who possess citizenship elsewhere, is still highly precarious.

West, many migrants are nonetheless displaced. Satzewich (1991) notes that any definition emphasizing individual choice or, as in this case, convenience, mischaracterizes many migrants' reasons for moving. Instead, he (1991, 37) asserts that, "...the decision to migrate either temporarily or permanently takes place in a context where structural constraints limit the degree of choice individuals or groups possess in the matter."

Not to be overlooked, migrant movement is fiercely regulated in service of global capitalism and the neoliberal state. Bearing in mind that the development of capitalism (and the extraction, exploitation, and [de]valuation of humans inherent under its relations) necessitated the differentiation of people based upon their appearance and the places they were in, it is readily apparent how some groups became racialized and subsequently made disposable more readily than others because of their identity (Bhattacharyya, 2018, Fanon, 1963; HoSang, LaBennett, and Pulido, 2012; Jackson, 2012; Rodney, 2018). A migrant's racialized identity alone, however, is not the only factor that dictates their social position. Theorists that combine critical race theory with historical materialism such as Fanon (1963), Wallerstein (1996), and Jones (from Davies, 2007) suggest that in colonial-capitalist societies, race and class are conjointly procreant and that racial and economic inequalities tend to reproduce and reinforce one another in a vicious circle. These inequalities are especially evident in the division and segregation of space. As Fanon (1963, 5) writes, in this "compartmentalized world [...] The cause is effect: you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich."

Notably, these dynamics are applicable to and encompass gender (Mohanty 2003). Black feminist scholars thereby insist upon the interlocking nature of multiple, plural oppressions. In her enduring work on intersectionality, Kimberle Crenshaw (1993) critiques the dominant framing of discrimination as a product of discrete functions which occur along single axes involving either race, class, or gender. Such understandings, she argues, frame racism and sexism as neither simultaneous nor interlocking, but as singular, unidimensional, independent, and divisible. By contrast, Crenshaw (1989) contends that concepts such as race, gender, and class are not mutually exclusive, but rather that they operate together to form a complex and multidimensional system of oppression. In her own engagement with Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) terms this intersection the "matrix of domination." Nationality and citizenship (or lack thereof)—that is, the legal relationship that one has to a particular state, evidenced by the possession of a passport—while undoubtedly a racialized category, also constitute discrete and powerful forms of globalized social capital in the twenty-first century.

Broadly, what these phenomena demonstrate is that racial subjects were (and continue to be) constructed, classified, and appraised in a plethora of ways across an expanse of differing geographies under a logic that organizes both economic and social relations, not to mention hierarchies. Moreover, such processes, which in (colonial) modernity as we know it have been guided by Eurocentric and white supremacist rationalizations, paradoxically, have also racialized certain white/white-passing groups<sup>5</sup> in particular places at specific times, whilst simultaneously being rooted in anti-Blackness.<sup>6</sup> The avowal here is that racial capitalism as a

<sup>5</sup> e.g. Irish, Italian, Polish, Greek, and other immigrants at the turn of the century, trajectories of Anti-Semitism, Eastern European migrants entering Western Europe, etc. Also consider the dynamic that it is not uncommon for people labeled "white trash," "rednecks," "trailer trash," etc. in the American Heartland and Deep South to be tasked with what gets called "n\*\*\*\*er work" or are "worked like a Mexican," to name a couple racialized turns of phrase. Here, we are by no means arguing the experiences of racialized subordination, violence, and trauma that any white communities were exposed to across history and society are commensurate with those of Black, Indigenous, and other negatively racialized communities. We simply draw attention to this example to show how processes of racialization can operate amongst homogenous groups of white people apropos labouring under capitalist relations, i.e. capitalism is racial capitalism. Effectively, despite being white, there are instances in which white people will further exploit, subordinate, and place at higher risk other white folks by suspending reality and treating them as if they are a Black person, assumed migrant, or perceived "foreigner." That is, despite being white, some white people are discursively framed as non-white, on occasion, in order to justify and more swiftly facilitate their devaluation and exploitation. Notably, white people in these instances, even if labelled with an epithet are *neither* permanently trapped by their phenotype and skin colour in what is a social geography (USA) produced by white supremacy and anti-Blackness, *nor* were white people specifically targeted for dispossession, deracination, enslavement, and genocide in the US. Contrariwise, they were rewarded for settling, as well as participating in the capture, dehumanization, and death, of racialized (non-white) people.

<sup>6</sup> Following Jackson (2014): "To be anti-black is also to be fundamentally anti-Indigenous." "Anti-Blackness" here also means anti-Indigenous. With recognition they are neither one in the same, nor mutually exclusive.

colonizing force and opportunistic predator is as adaptable as it is resilient. Bhattacharyya (2018, x) poignantly drives home the point about its esurient and protean nature when she writes:

Racial capitalism includes the sedimented histories of racialized dispossession that shape economic life in our time, but is never reducible to those histories. There are *new and unpredictable modes of dispossession to be understood* alongside the centuries-old carnage that moistens the earth beneath our feet [emphasis added].

Indeed, racial capitalism and colonialism are enmeshed and interlocking, but this is neither to say that colonization was/is exclusively driven by the sole desire to accumulate resources and establish markets (Pulido 2017), nor is it to suggest that the differential (de)valuation and launching of race (and gender, for that matter) only arose with the advance of capitalism. The creation of race and subsequent production of racial subjects offers the imperialist imagination a convenient justification and serviceable pretext to dispossess and enslave, to plunder and exterminate—acts taught to be in some far distant past and oft-thought to reside only in the annals of history, yet that continue to shatter communities and alienate individuals to this day (Blaut, 1993; McKittrick, 2011; Melamed, 2015; Robinson 2000). In other words, race was constructed and subsequently weaponized to reap power, wealth, land and a baseless and bizarre sense of (white) supremacy off of the deracination and dehumanization, as well as exploitation and elimination, of Others.

Accordingly, for negatively racialized people, the decision to migrate is generally motivated by neither personal convenience nor the desire to badge themselves a “global citizen,” but by the urgent and daily need to be able to socially reproduce themselves (as well as perhaps their families). As Bhattacharyya (2018, x) explains, “racial capitalism helps us to understand how people *become divided from each other* in the name of economic *survival* or in the name of economic *well-being* [emphasis added]. These divisions between insiders and outsiders, under a racialized regime of global apartheid are mirrored at the local, daily level. Where a system of de facto segregation is characterized by a largely Manichaeistic (Fanon, 1963) distinction between citizens and non-citizens. For example, at a local level, one’s possession of citizenship papers determines access to social services, employment benefits and rights, privacy, mobility, and legal representation.

In her study of Jamaican migrant farmworkers in the Okanagan Valley, a region with a majority white settler population, Hjalmarson (2016) shows how the differential inclusion and segregation of non-citizen workers in Canada also constitutes a racialized segregation that separates “temporary” Black migrants from “permanent” white residents (how long a white resident has actually lived in the community is of little importance). Borders take the form of fences, walls, and partitions; uncomfortable silences and uneasy smiles; the act of “keeping one’s distance;” and the avoidance of eye contact, to name a few. The most seemingly minute of race-oriented experiences, such as when Jamaican workers discuss being given too much space on the sidewalk or flashed artificial smiles that are mediated by startled eyes in the street, offer profoundly intimate examples of the interpersonal consequences of the divisions that Bhattacharyya (2018) describes above in life under racial capitalism.

Entrenched division along lines of both space and race is also stark and visceral at the (inter)national level, with the exercise and enforcement of legal and physical exclusion at the border being neither objective nor impartial. As mentioned earlier, Foucault (2003, 254) characterizes (state) racism as the “break between what must live and what must die.” Borders thereby frequently (re)make and maintain the difference between life and death. Writing of the border between Mexico and the United States, Chicana-feminist Gloria Anzaldúa (1987, 25) describes the border as an open wound, a place “where the Third World grates against the First and bleeds.” Her haunting portrayal of the necropolitics of racial capitalism that operate amidst the borderlands draws attention to the violence inherent in the confrontation between two neocolonial states. Violence that is all the more intensified when one state is obstinately

determined never to loosen the tight grip it has on the privileges and entitlements it generated via the spoils of colonial war. And violence that is further accelerated by conceited broadcastings to the world that it will forever defend its borders, not to mention its self-ascribed “greatness” and “exceptionalism” — no matter the human cost.

## Myths and Misconceptions

*A nation that cannot control its borders is not a nation.*

Tweeted by Donald Trump (2015)

*I think Europe needs to get a handle on migration  
because that is what lit the flame.*

Hilary Clinton (2018)

While the emphasis for a focus on the particular and place-based has been stressed above, some abuses do seem universal. We exist on a planet where people crossing a line, illegitimate and brutally imposed, without state<sup>7</sup> permission are constructed and condemned as “illegal.” Indeed, as observed during both Canada’s federal elections in 2015 and those in the US in 2016, as well as subsequently, no mention need be made of race at all when slogans such as “barbaric cultural practices,” “bad hombres,” “stone cold criminals,” “rapists,” and “animals” can be used to point to and exclude an entire, supposedly homogenous, group of racialized immigrants (Barber, 2015). That is, colonizer logic, law, and aggression—bolstered because of a tacit social agreement and sustained via a complicit citizenry—has normalized the belief that some people are, in fact, “criminal aliens” that must be stopped from “invading” and “breeding.” It sounds like a frenzied and frenetic scene out of a dystopian apocalypse, but then again, some argue that is precisely what authoritarian populism (Hall, 1985) is creating (Davis et al, 2019; Gilbert, 2016; Vourvoulias, 2018). Blaming migrants, though, is especially baffling given evidence they commit less crime than citizens in both the US and Canada (Vaughn and Salas-Wright 2018; Zhang, 2014; Dinovitzer, Hagan, Levi, 2009).

The criminalization of migration thereby stands as an especially inexplicable and paradoxical injustice given it relies upon a worldview that christens the state and corporation with personhood. A status that is purportedly infringed upon or trespassed against if an otherwise freely moving human, who is not baptized in the name of the state with citizenship or given its blessing of personhood, exists in the same space. And to be made “illegal,” undocumented, non-status, irregular, “alien,” and “animal” is to be dehumanized. Relegated to the domain of the subaltern, scapegoat, underclass, and sub-human. Moreover, the devaluing of human life at the site of the border is a reality that disproportionately impacts poor people, women, and queer folk, especially if they are Black, Brown, or Indigenous (Shadel, 2018; Walia, 2015). Subjecting them to not only blunt force trauma and possible incarceration, but chronic waiting, constant worry, and prolonged exposure (Conlon, 2011). Additionally, when considering how militarization, detainment, and racial othering characterize bordering schemes, the terms “terrorists,” “toncs,” and “threats” are suddenly are thrown into the xenophobic mix to rile up the nationalist fervor. Largely, again, at the behest of private capital and the (colonial) state, as well as to fuel the flattering illusion of history and “destiny” that are held by proud citizens and settler-patriots.

Ethno-nationalist panic (in many countries and places “white,” but not always) and fear-mongering about migrants thinly veiled as concern about economic imbalances, local workers losing jobs, and citizens not getting a fair shake is particularly confounding given that it is not migrant labour that is driving down wages. Rather, the decisions and practices of governments and employers, imbued with capitalist logics and armed with borders, who do. Principally, by engineering relations of production to create super-exploitable reserve pools of labour. A scenario each entity attempts to facilitate and would profit off of whether it be migrants or

<sup>7</sup> We also contend that the state is illegitimate and brutally imposed.

citizens in said standby labour army. As countless studies on neoliberalism have shown, the business interests and enterprises of the state, private security industry, power elite, and plantation owner are not all that threatened by migration (Anderson, 2010; Preibisch, 2010; Mullings 2011). In fact, they prey on and capitalize off it, placing migrant workers in conditions, according to Walia (2013, 6), akin to those of “slavery and servitude.” The realities of which, too, are exceedingly devastating for women (Cohen and Caxaj, 2018; Pratt, 2009).

Private owners of the means of production, along with their often bought-and-paid for state officials (Klumpp, Mialon, and Williams, 2016), regularly pay lip service to social responsibility and peddle narratives about hiring citizens and domestic job creation. Yet capital is far more likely to desire fewer regulations, more transnational circulation, and *less* borders for itself. Capital desires being unrestrained and going global (e.g. outsourcing, offshoring, bodysourcing, transfer pricing.). It allows employers to extract more surplus value from workers with less labour protections in countries elsewhere, or hire precarious transient workers at cheap prices provided “legally” via state policies and free trade (foreign worker programmes, etc.) (Bradley and Luxton, 2010; Cohen and Hjalmarsen, 2018; Strauss and McGrath, 2017).

There, too, remains the option of exploiting *illegalized* workers given the porosity of borders and that migrants will often risk death crossing them out of desperation (Clibborn, 2015). If they subsequently make it, as undocumented migrant workers they are compelled to participate in unsafe exploitative arrangements (often jobs citizens will not do) with employers who exercise more control and intimidation over them given their lack of papers (e.g. being threatened with deportation) (Flynn, Eggerth, and Jacobson Jr, 2015). International solidarity from citizens in receiving-countries in these scenarios would thereby not only support (migrant) labour, but also benefit those very citizen-workers who are concerned about “foreigners” crossing borders given it would result in more bargaining power. In addition, the decision to uproot and move or separate from one’s family for months to years is far more a product of socio-economic situation and structural circumstance than it is an individual choice made in a vacuum immune to external influences (Holmes, 2013). Understanding these realities will prove useful towards grasping fully the migration dynamics of systemic force(s) versus personal choice.

Similarly, there remains a great deal of misinformation about resource use and allocation regarding migrants and refugees. Outcry here hinges upon the assertion there is not enough to go ‘round for “foreigners” and that distributions to migrants take away from deserving citizens. In some cases, which are qualified and envisioned to occur under strictly monitored circumstances, the argument is that social spending is not even being allocated to those (invented and imagined) “model” minorities and migrants who are “coming here/doing things the right way” (read: legal and “white”). “Model migrants/minorities” are those portrayed as reverently biddable, deferentially submissive, and willfully acculturative (Rojas, 2009). Despite all these claims, immigrants are not the parasitic drain on government coffers they are purported to be (Orrenius, 2017). In fact, according to longitudinal studies, immigrants in many places add to the state’s bottom line more than they subtract from it, particularly when it comes to healthcare (Blau and Mackie, 2017; Flavin et al, 2018).

Additionally, migrants are paying taxes, working jobs, starting careers, building lives, creating businesses, and investing in the communities where they live. Meaning, they are not a “net drain” (Lowrey, 2018). Likewise, as Nawyn (2019) aptly points out: “given the wealth and economic power of the United States, claims that it does not have enough resources to help refugees is really a claim that refugees are *not worthy* of state resources, or that *under neoliberalism the resources of the state are no longer available to people based on economic need* [emphasis added].” All of this evidence makes for more of a devastating critique and damning indictment of racial capitalism and nationalism, than it does of migrants and border transgressions. An important caveat for us to offer in dispelling myths about migration with regard to financial statistics and economic data at this juncture is that irrespective of whether a migrant is “contributing” or not, and regardless of whether they are a “plus or a minus” in the figurative ledger sheet, it is imperative to view others neither as human capital, nor a potential

economic liability. But as people. The world is not a plantation. Humans need not be financial assets, obsequious supplicants, good capitalist subjects, well-behaved citizens, or fashionable consumers to be entitled to basic human needs, rights, and freedom.

The key issue at hand apropos borders and geographies of deracination, then, is not figuring out “what to do with?” displaced humans seeking passage and sanctuary who want or need to move. It is asking better questions and coming to terms with which deserves more care, attention, resources, rights, and protection: borders or people? Thus far, the answer and evidence offered by both state officials and entrepreneurs has been made quite clear. As Bhattacharyya (2018, 136) explains, “given the centrality of im-migration control to the performance of statehood, the securitized border represents one of the most highly profitable opportunities for private corporations this century.” Despite this border opportunism, human rights violations spurred by the nexus of Western worldviews, racial hierarchies, neoliberal policies, state capitalism, and bordering (i.e. colonial power) must become a matter of making the decision to ask, and honestly answer, the threefold question: “Who has been uprooted here, who should be able to stay, and who should have a say?”

Crucially, responses to this query must be mindful of both history and geography. Specifically, Indigenous histories and geographies. Undeniably, the spread of colonialism, driving forces of capital accumulation, escalation of imperial aggression, diffusion of Eurocentrism, metastasization of white supremacy, and machinations of modern statecraft all targeted, took advantage of, dispossessed, captured, coercively displaced, and tried to enslave and eliminate Indigenous people. Across a wide array of differing continents and contexts. Debates and clashes surrounding “Who belongs?” (as well as queries about who should even be posing such a question) vis-à-vis the historical-contemporary practices of deracination and complex products of diaspora and migration (e.g. hybrid, arrivant, settler, mixed-race, multi-ethnic identities/subject positions) require caution and carefully measured consideration. As well as a mandate of non-metaphorical decolonization (Tuck and Yang, 2012) with a deliberate commitment not only to responsibly grappling with, resolving, and rectifying the intergenerational injuries meted out by the historical trajectories of deracination, dispossession, and enslavement—but also to unfettering, (re)turning to, and centering Indigenous worldviews while concurrently struggling for migrant justice.

## Conclusion

*“Our Mother Earth—militarized, fenced-in, poisoned—  
...demands that we take action.”*

Berta Cáceres (2015)

To close, we offer five points that we hope are useful towards understanding borders:

- 1) Borders are signifiers and sites of unnecessary division, deracination, and violence, as well as illegitimate instruments of ongoing colonial power, that have an ever-expanding reach which emerges from the historical trajectories and continued legacies of imperialist dispossession, enslavement, and attempted genocide;
- 2) Borders operate relationally to organize and structure migrant relationships with the state, political economy, and citizen body politic, consequently rendering them more vulnerable to the exploitative, abusive, and dehumanizing practices of racial capitalism, xenophobic nationalism, and ableist heteropatriarchy;
- 3) Borders act primarily as disciplinary racially-coded tools to prohibit and neglect, rather than secure and protect, humans expressing their right to mobility—thereby restricting access to legal, political, and labour protections, social inclusion, and in some cases sanctuary and asylum in times of danger and acute distress;

- 4) Borders exist not only tangibly where two territories meet physically, but also discursively via racial ideologies in rhetoric, policy, law, and quotidian social relations—not to mention psychologically in how they shape identities, fashion subjects, and are “carried” and “worn” by migrants and refugees everywhere they go (e.g. communities, fields, factories, streets, homes, airports, markets, etc.);
- 5) Borders, to be overcome and undone, demand action, hope, and imagination...  
...“*determined, enlightened, and resolute*,” as Fanon (1963, 235) would say.

Admittedly, imagining and envisioning new local and global communities, both in conception and construction, will be laden with paradox. As migrants fight for in-roads to citizenship and their calls for inclusion are broadcast by activists and academics, the colonial state is reproduced. As communities stretch and develop beyond the state and become increasingly deterritorialized, some Indigenous groups assert sovereignty in statist-terms. As some white scholars call for inclusion and decolonization, “the presence of Indigenous people is largely facilitated by, or filtered through, non-Indigenous ‘experts’” (de Leeuw and Hunt, 2018).

However, despite these (and countless others) contradictions the alternative of giving in, remaining where we are today, and perpetuating the same extortionate system, knowing what we know, is to fortify a decaying citadel. Just as the (dis)order of the present world will not be transformed through nationalism that either extends the state or brings the Other inside its bounds (Walker, 2006), so neither will the international state system be transformed through national revolutions by the working-class. The struggle for global migrant justice is a fight against borders in their many forms, and against the imperialist forces, functionaries, and discourses enforcing them. It is a fight against the ongoing deracination, dispossession, and repression of racialized peoples around the world (Walia, 2013). And it is a struggle that demands a response, like that of the Zapatistas (2017), which is beholden to a politics of rage and care—of defiance and compassion—and echoes a set of ethics and actions similar to the following:

It is necessary to say “No” to persecutions, expulsions, prisons, walls, and borders. [...] And to say “No” to the national bad governments [states] that are and have been accomplices to policies of terror, destruction, and death. ...The time has come to create solidarity committees with the criminalized and persecuted of humanity.

Cultivating this type of justice for and with migrants means defying convention and forming new radical, political, and transformative relationships across orthodox divides of race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, and difference. Relationships rooted in trust, empathy, purpose, mutuality, meaningful work, connection, and joy. It will require “crossing the river” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 78) instead of shouting at each other from opposite banks.

Most importantly, it will require a readiness to listen, learn, and collaborate in order to achieve what we have only imagined (or perhaps could return to)—free movement for the peoples of the world and, as the Zapatistas propose, “a world in which many worlds fit.” To end this piece on what effectively has been an account of the capture, confinement, and suffocation spawned by colonial worldviews, capitalist logics, and borders, we turn to the sentiments and revolutionary spirit of Frantz Fanon (1963, 15), who dreams:

*I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, and climbing. I dream I burst out laughing, I am leaping across a river and chased by a pack of cars—  
—that never catches up with me.*

May everyone of this world burst forth free, laughing and running, and never be caught.\*

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\* In whatever way they “run.”



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